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ABSTRACT

It is widely agreed that the United Kingdom's post-16 qualification system must be made coherent and intelligible to users. Developing a credit-based certification system is the key to increasing participation in further education (FE) and achieving a broader, more flexible curriculum. The benefits of a credit-based certification framework for learners, providers, and employers are evident in case studies of eight FE colleges in Wales that participated in a 3-year pilot project to embed credit-based certification systems in FE. The case studies provide important lessons on the following aspects of development and implementation of credit-based certification: designing programs, assessing on a continuous basis; planning across colleges; offering sampler courses; reaching the disaffected; unitizing access programs; mapping common elements; and improving life chances. The benefits of credit-based certification in FE are also evident in six case studies that were conducted in England to examine the application of a credit-based certification framework to accomplish the following: develop learning materials and improve quality; use a discrete generic model to unitize the curriculum; facilitate progression from school to work; facilitate progression from FE to higher education; base resourcing on credit; and promote institutional change. (Contains 20 references) (MN)

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FEDA Further Education Development Agency

Give us the credit: achieving a comprehensive FE framework

Sally Coady, Tony Tait and Jim Bennett

Volume 1 Number 20

FE MATTERS

CE 074 785

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Give us the credit: achieving a comprehensive FE framework

Sally Coady, Tony Tait and Jim Bennett

FE MATTERS

FEDA paper

About the authors

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Solihull College

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The photograph on page 20 is reproduced with kind permission of Wirral Metropolitan College, taken by David Kelly.

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Foreword

There is a widespread consensus that our post-16 qualification system needs to be made coherent and intelligible to users. The Dearing *Review of Qualifications for 16-19 Year Olds* has gone some way to establishing a framework accessible to more learners, with delineated levels of attainment and progression pathways.

However, to meet the needs of all learners and create a framework for lifelong learning further developments are required.

FEDA believes that further progress should draw on the work carried out in England and Wales during the last four years to develop the credit framework first proposed in 1992. Developing qualifications and funding systems in this way would:

- give individuals engaged in all learning a more effective way to measure progress
- provide the basis for an overarching 16-19 certificate or qualification
- offer a more accurate measure for achievement of national targets
- provide a vehicle for more equitable distribution of funding.

FEDA's work on credit is widely endorsed by FE colleges and other providers. The Welsh Office has funded credit developments in Wales for the past three years and the FEFC Wales now uses credit as a basis for funding.

The case studies in Section 2 of this paper illustrate how learners in Wales are already benefiting from this credit system. Section 3 reports on the different ways colleges which have developed credit-based systems have applied FEDA's credit framework and the case studies in this section spotlight examples of how colleges in England have applied the framework.

The report on widening participation by Helena Kennedy, entitled *Learning works* (July 1997), recommends that a national credit framework be established, a proposal which has been backed by the FEFC.

The benefits which have emerged underline why FEDA is proposing that a national credit-based system be developed to meet the needs of the nation in the 21st century. Developments to date not only show that much is already possible; they also reveal how much more could be achieved if the funding and qualifications environment was more conducive.

Tony Tait
Education Staff, FEDA

1. Establishing a framework

Need for change

Despite considerable improvement in further education participation in recent years, no more than 20% of adults take part in any form of publicly-funded education or training (Centre for Economic Performance, 1996). This is compounded by the low level at which people in the workforce are qualified. UK statistics show that the number of 16-18 year olds in education is low compared to other countries internationally and failure is high.

In 1995, the National Commission revealed in its report *Learning to succeed: after 16* that 40% of 17 year olds do not succeed in achieving their intended qualification. In 1994-95, nearly 20% of those who took A-levels failed to reach the minimum pass grade (*Education Statistics for the UK*, 1996). The effects of this wastage of potential and resources are well documented (see, for example, *Unfinished business*, Audit Commission). The implications for the UK economy are serious. As more and more people take on the belief that large numbers of unqualified unemployed adults are victims of and contributors to our social problems, the pressure mounts on the FE sector to provide solutions.

Colleges are striving to widen participation and to offer a broader and more flexible curriculum. However, in 1996 the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) calculated that nearly 80% of students older than 19 were following programmes which did not fall within Sir Ron Dearing's national qualification framework (figure supplied by FEFC from its internal database). An absence of programmes which meet the needs of adult learners is a problem, and this is largely due to the learning required not falling within the existing framework: either it is a small part of a larger qualification or the skills and knowledge required are new or different and there is not yet a national award to accredit them.

Learners in the UK still have the choice of more than 14,000 qualifications overseen by more than 100 awarding bodies. This covers full-time and part-time learning opportunities which may involve qualifications, awards and certificates and could have an academic, vocational or applied learning focus.

This picture reveals the urgent need for a comprehensive accreditation system which will ensure that learners, tutors and employers know where all qualifications and courses stand in relation to one another, a system which will ensure that all learning is recognised.

Why is a new framework necessary?

Education providers should be aiming to offer learning opportunities which are:

- accessible to as many people as possible
- adaptable to changing requirements of the population and workplace
- flexible so that more people can learn the right skills at the right time
- rigorous and relevant with appropriate forms of assessment
- valued and understood so that learners know where they stand and employers know what to look for.

An extensive range of provision is required to meet all these needs. The vast suite of learning opportunities which will result will need to be linked in some readily understandable way via a common language for describing achievement which is understood by all relevant parties.

The current framework for providing these links is not clear, flexible or responsive enough to satisfy the requirements of large numbers of learners for whom the following act as barriers:

- lack of clarity of specifications to ensure that learning can be matched to individuals' starting points, academic ability, learning aptitude, levels of confidence and personal resources
- an absence of a mechanism for establishing equivalences across learning pathways and no facility to transfer credit

- the difficulty within most qualifications of gaining credit for the component parts
- the difficulty in transferring and accumulating credit from different sources into recognised awards, leading to duplication of learning and effort, which both demoralises learners and wastes resources
- the lack of a mechanism which ensures that all qualifications and awards are customised, relevant and up to date.

A basic framework was proposed by Dearing in his *Review of Qualifications for 16-19 Year Olds*. While it will help by introducing clear levels, it does not provide a common means to specify qualifications and then compare their size. The extent or volume of achievement at a particular level is an important way to compare the various awards available.

Without a universal framework for measuring and describing achievement, learners cannot be certain of their current position on the education ladder. For example, what value does a GNVQ have compared to GCSEs, AS-/A-levels, NVQs and others outside the main family of qualifications?

As a result it is difficult for learners to assess accurately what new learning programmes are available to them, or what route they should take to achieve a specific learning goal.

For example, a student wanting to go on a particular course may be unsure of whether her existing achievements will provide access on to this course, or what learning attainment is necessary to fulfil entry requirements.

Students faced with such a confused picture as to where their learning careers can take them next may become demotivated and, as a result, not continue with learning.

The lack of a universally-recognised framework also creates problems for admission tutors: their task of shortlisting candidates is made more difficult because comparing achievement across qualifications is impossible.

Employers are affected too: they do not understand the content and relative value of qualifications brought by candidates applying for jobs; they also find it difficult to identify the best qualifications and courses for existing employees.

Moving towards a credit-based system

The framework being developed in FE allows learners to earn credit for their achievements from all types of provision, and will establish a common way to express the value of different types of learning achievements. It will:

- support achievement of national targets by recognising part achievement of qualifications
- help to move the national qualifications framework further forward
- help to generate new qualifications such as an overarching qualification and baccalaureate
- make possible a system of credit accumulation and transfer
- allow learners, providers, planners and funders to understand achievement more effectively and make comparisons between different attainments
- increase students' motivation to learn
- allow learners to place the value of their achievements in context with the world of learning and employment
- equip learners to recognise what new learning they require, what opportunities exist, and which route to take
- enable students' performance to be measured and recognised in the course of existing learning programmes.

The framework will be used to give a value to existing qualifications and awards, without necessarily altering their characteristics. It preserves the diversity of existing provision because it describes important differences

between qualifications rather than removing them. For example, awards of different sizes can be developed for specific purposes while making clear their size relative to other qualifications.

If adopted as a national system, it will allow learners to plan efficient progression routes not just within FE, but also from pre-16 to FE and from FE to higher education (HE).

To progress the development of credit-based systems within post-14 education FEDA aims to:

- ensure that policymakers, planners, civil servants and politicians are aware of the benefits of the credit framework
- ensure that the architecture and specifications of the credit framework are robust and fully developed
- identify any difficulties which would need to be addressed to implement credit-based qualifications
- support regional and local developments for implementing credit-based systems and providing information on key issues and good practice
- ensure that credit can be carried across the FE-HE divide and across the UK, Europe and beyond.

Designing the system

FEDA believes that to provide a workable credit-based system, achievement should be broken down into units of assessment. The size of the units should be determined by decisions about sensible, coherent groupings of knowledge, skills and understanding. Attention should be given to ensuring that coherence and the integrity of subjects are preserved.

The system allows for units to be many different sizes. The larger the unit, the greater the credit value and the more credits the learner can earn. The framework also involves specifying all achievement in terms of units of assessment, comprised of learning outcomes. Each unit will have the following elements:

Title	a well-defined and specific (subject) name
Learning outcome	what a learner is expected to know, understand and do
Assessment criteria	standards for achieving outcomes
Level	level of difficulty (eight would be needed, covering from the National Curriculum to HE/professional qualifications)
Credit value	a numerical value derived from unit size

Learning outcomes are a key feature of the unit specification. Together with assessment criteria they make clear what a learner needs to achieve. They also allow common achievement to be compared and identified between different awards. Such a system has the potential for greater flexibility and choice for learners because they can tailor their learning on a unit basis, rather than a qualification basis. The units of learning are in more manageable amounts, and since students are awarded credit(s) for completion of a unit their motivation to learn is increased and sustained. Also, because learning is broken up into a greater number of chunks, assessment can cover a greater part of what is learned within the programme.

Learning will be more adaptable because changes can be made more easily through units. The learning outcomes provide a universal language for describing all achievement. This is accompanied by a numerical measure of achievement: the credit values and levels.

A learner can achieve individual units and have each recorded in a standard way through credits at various levels.

FEDA proposes eight levels, encompassing achievement from the National Curriculum to postgraduate and professional qualifications. Detailed level descriptors have been developed for the first four levels, known as Entry and levels 1, 2 and 3. FEDA wants to extend the descriptors to encompass HE, postgraduate and professional levels and qualifications.

Because many qualifications – for example, modular AS- and A-levels, GNVQs and NVQs – are already expressed in units they can be quite easily incorporated into this framework.

The 'credit value' of a unit is formed by agreeing the notional learning time set for a learner to achieve each unit's learning outcomes. This does not mean that learners have to spend a particular amount of time before their achievement is recognised; it is just used as a means of comparison to determine the size at which the unit should be set. Achieving the learning outcomes is what counts, not how the learner gets to that stage. So, for example, a 30-hour unit at level 3 earns one credit, while a 60-hour unit at the same level has a credit value of two, and a 90-hour unit a credit value of three. Thirty hours is used as the base value for one credit since it is a small enough amount of time to allow flexible use of units, and large enough to be reliably assessed.

These units will form a database of national units. Education providers will be able to choose units from this database to build a portfolio of courses to offer their students.

There also needs to be scope for units to be devised by education and training providers, so that they can respond to innovation, local need and any demand for customised awards. Specified combinations are required for achieving specific qualifications.

Offering flexibility and innovation

Education providers who decide to design their own units, because existing ones do not cover the desired aspects, should ensure that:

- learning outcomes are clear and coherent
- the unit has been ascribed a level and a size
- the area is not covered adequately by any other national qualification
- unit certification is not available within any national qualification.

FEDA believes that these criteria should be common and should be used by awarding bodies to accredit units.

The use of units as the basis of this framework means that colleges are not confined to a single method of delivery. The learning outcomes of a unit can be achieved via college-based programmes, work-based learning, accreditation of previous experience, distance learning and other routes (see Figure 1). Those using a module-based method of delivery will also have considerable freedom as to how to incorporate these units. The relationship between units and modules has been made deliberately flexible. For example, the outcomes of a single unit could be achieved via one module, or through two or more modules. Alternatively, a single module could deliver outcomes which contribute to a number of different units.

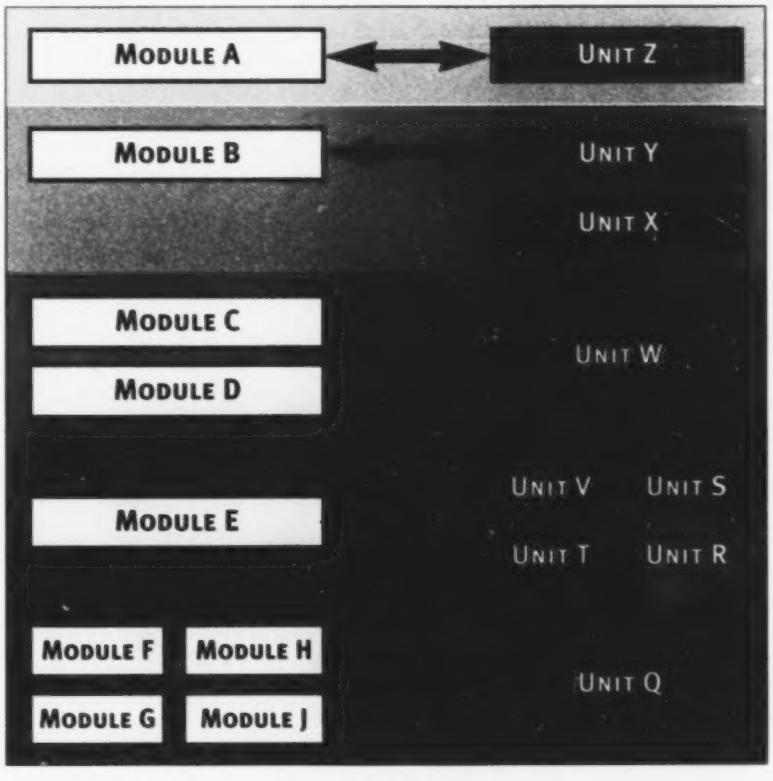

FIGURE 1: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UNITS AND MODULES

Providing credit transcripts

The value and level of units (and hence the qualifications and awards which are derived from them) achieved by learners, could be indicated on a nationally-recognised and accepted credit transcript. This could serve as the front sheet of the National Record of Achievement and be used by admissions tutors and employers to select candidates. Students can stop and start their learning career as they please; any new credits achieved, at whatever stage in their learning, can be added to their transcript. This can be a portfolio of their success which they can carry with them throughout their career and develop as they go.

An example of what a credit transcript might look like is given in Figure 2.

Applying credit-based systems

Developing a unit-based qualification system, where all qualifications and their unit components have been assigned a credit value, would help education providers to establish a range of related credit-based systems. These could include one for funding and resourcing, one for staff appraisal and one for quality improvements. Developing credit-based systems in these areas would be of use not only to the college institutionally; learners, funders, planners, employers and the community as a whole would also benefit because the whole operation becomes more transparent.

A unit-based system also offers colleges advantages at a planning level. Units can be grouped in different ways, according to the nature of the learning outcomes that they represent, to assist with different aspects of planning. For example, this can:

- help you to map the curriculum and identify areas where there are gaps, duplication and overlap
- clarify progression issues and show which units are prerequisites for others
- clarify the relative costs of providing particular units.

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Record of Achievement *Credit Transcript*

Student Name Jo Smith — Entry Level — Level 1 — Credit Total: 4
Student Reg. No. 96xxxxxx — Level 2 — Level 3 — 45
Date of Birth 1980 — Level 4 — Level 5
Date of Transcript 2006 — Level 6 — Level 7

Date	Provider	Qualification/Units Achieved	Credit Value	Level
1987	Old School	4 GCSEs	20	2
		GNVQ Unit – Leisure & Tourism	3	2
1988	First Bank Ltd	NVQ Unit – Banking	4	1
		First Aid Cert	3	2
2001	New College	GNVQ Business	36	3
		AS French	9	3
		NVQ Unit – Accountancy	4	4

FIGURE 2: EXAMPLE OF A CREDIT TRANSCRIPT

Indicating which units are common to different qualifications will show which transfer routes are possible and reveal how aspects of the same learning can be used by learners to achieve additional awards.

Benefits of a credit-based system

For learners

A credit-based framework offers the means to:

- explain to others the relative value of the qualification or award they have attained
- provide an employer with a clearer picture of what they know
- identify more easily new learning choices from a universal and continually updated national database of units
- transfer what they learn between career paths, colleges and even countries
- develop a portfolio of achievements via the credit transcript in the knowledge that all units count as recognised achievement
- place their achievement in context with their (and others') learning experience
- build a unique, lifelong learning plan.

For providers

The framework offers:

- a flexible architecture which allows education providers to respond to change, to strengthen their existing provision and to create new and valuable learning opportunities which are tailor-made to the needs of their students
- the means to identify areas of overlap or duplication in their curriculum offer, which they can address
- the ability to compare existing qualifications without necessarily having to redefine their inherent characteristics
- a national database of units from which new components can be added to existing programmes and qualifications in a measurable way
- the potential for closer collaboration between industry and education through a universally recognised and understood framework of learning achievement and values
- the ability to identify and communicate more effectively the resourcing and funding of education and training
- a way to assess their learning provision and plan for the future from a market-led perspective
- a rational basis for comparing students over time.

For the employer

Such a framework provides the employer with:

- a means to understand better and to compare the value of achievements of future applicants and current employees
- the chance to use credits as a means to specify minimum job requirements and to express the qualifications and skills they need from job candidates
- a clearer way of identifying and assessing on-the-job training and additional opportunities
- a more skilled and flexible workforce
- an easy way to reward training.

Next steps

The framework, in its current state of development, has been successfully applied in many further education colleges nationwide and FEDA's work on credit is now widely endorsed by many education providers. The framework has been piloted specifically by all FE colleges in Wales. Open College Networks (OCNs) apply the credit framework specifications and accredit an increasing volume of achievement, so there is widespread experience within FE colleges of applying such a framework.

The framework is also supported by bodies such as the Association of Colleges, Edexcel (formed from the merger of Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) and University of London Examinations and Assessment Council in September 1996), Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP), the London Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats.

The FEFC has recently commissioned FEDA to develop a strategy for implementing credit-based systems in further education as part of the Kennedy Committee work on widening participation. This committee, chaired by Helena Kennedy QC, reported in July 1997 and recommended that a national credit framework be set up within five years.

The benefits the framework offers have quickly become apparent. The next step is to achieve national agreement on a system so that all qualifications and their unit components carry a credit value and level. It will take time for credit to become a universal currency. The more institutions that recognise it, the greater the benefits to the learner, employer and provider.

Using the framework now

Colleges can use the framework now for accreditation of learning through OCNs, the Edexcel/BTEC award framework, Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and other credit-based qualifications and awards. They can also use it for:

- developing progression routes:
  - → internally
  - → with other providers such as schools, community education and adult education establishments
  - → into higher education
- formalising records and transcripts of learner achievement
- creating opportunities for partial and interim accreditation
- achieving curriculum mapping, analysis, design and development
- developing a framework for designing resource-based learning materials
- improving teaching, and student involvement
- improving assessment and student feedback
- designing the internal resourcing mechanism
- increasing flexibility and encouraging modularisation and resource-based learning
- improving quality and quantifying improvement across institutions
- developing a guidance framework
- contributing to effective marketing and presentation of college provision.

Ways to achieve some of these objectives are outlined in Section 3. Colleges can also make use of FEDA's national credit network. This includes more than 400 organisations committed to credit-based developments. As well as holding regular meetings, it offers a development database, a newsletter updating members and a World-Wide-Web site including forums for making contacts, sharing good practice and discussing issues. FEDA can arrange training and consultancy for colleges.

Wales pilot project

All colleges in Wales were involved in piloting the framework, a three-year programme funded by the Welsh Office to embed credit-based systems within further education. Its aim was to develop a credit framework, based on the criteria outlined by FEDA's predecessor body, the Further Education Unit, in *A Basis for Credit?* (FEU, 1992). In so doing it would seek to:

- address problems in the qualifications' structure, with which the FE sector had long been grappling
- contribute to the philosophy of flexibility which colleges were embracing as a means to become more cost-effective and better equipped to meet growth targets set by the FEFC.

Achieving such flexibility would result in a sector offering provision more suited to the adult learners which it would need to attract to effect that growth. As a result of this project, the FEFC (Wales) now uses credit as the basis for funding, as from 1997, and there is a national credit scheme in place for Wales. The following section looks at the experiences of eight colleges in the year 1995-96 as they put the credit-based system into use. Their practical experiences offer key messages to the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), to the FEFC and to the sector as a whole as to the benefits of this framework. The case studies also provide invaluable feedback on different ways to apply this system, which can inform the next stages of development.

2. Applying the credit framework in Wales

The Wales FE credit framework and system, known as CREDIS, has been developed through the Welsh Office-funded Modularisation and Credit-Based Development Project 1993-97. Managed by Fforwm (the independent organisation of FE colleges in Wales), this project has allowed FE staff in Wales to develop together the FEDA specifications for an FE credit framework which can articulate with HE.

So far, 7,000 units of assessment have been approved, mapping the bulk of the FE curriculum. These units are stored on the CREDIS database which has been produced as a CD-ROM, allowing any unit to be located easily via click-and-point search facilities. The CD also contains information on guidance, tracking, funding, programme design and quality assurance. A CREDIS transcript has been developed to reflect all lifelong achievement.

The case studies that follow illustrate how this credit-based framework can help with:

- accreditation, by breaking down learning into smaller parts
- mapping provision and existing qualifications to identify overlap and common elements between what was being offered and what needed to be offered. This has led to:
  - → better student progression arrangements
  - → clearer information producing better guidance, feedback and motivation
  - → learning programmes which allow students to chart their own progress
  - → the potential for widening choice through new provision and through common teaching of existing provision.

Case study 1: programme design

At Deeside College, the demand for programmes in information technology (IT) is so high that the college was able to recruit 150 students without any external advertising.

However, it became clear that existing forms of accreditation did not suit this group of new recruits, of whom 90% are employed in local industry. Staff in the computing section of the Department of Business Applications took this as an opportunity to design their own award tailored to suit their learners.

The units they devised encompassed the learning outcomes students would need to perform IT tasks in a work environment. These learning outcomes include ones often omitted in other awards, such as achieving a basic understanding of computer hardware, the jargon, the history, and the uses of IT in industry.

Learners can choose to receive a new Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) award on completion of these units, which provides progression for those who already hold a Royal Society of Arts (RSA) certificate.

Previously, the college offered Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) and Integrated Business Systems certificates, both awarded by RSA. These lacked the flexibility required by part-time employed students who want recognition for learning which enhances their performance in work. They also did not allow learners to specialise in a particular IT application or to combine learning in different applications at more than one level.

All of the IT classes originally offered learning in all applications. They now specialise in either word-processing, database design and management, or spreadsheets. Students have moved groups according to their preferred option and needs. The approach is essentially student-centred. One learner commented:

I haven't attempted level 3 yet because I know from looking at the unit that I'm not ready.

A STUDENT AT DEESIDE COLLEGE REAPS THE BENEFITS OF A SPECIALLY DESIGNED WORK-BASED IT AWARD

All core IT programmes and GNVQ core skills in IT are now designed around the units. In this way the unit is also the module of delivery. Some are backed up by self-study packages and tutorials.

All staff, especially non-specialists, have been informed of what the students should be able to do on completion of each unit, not just on what they will be assessed. Assignments are shared across all IT programmes and standard tests have been designed. Learners not achieving the full GNVQ units can seek accreditation from the local OCN for their achievements.

Lecturers are fully committed to this new approach. Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) Wales recently awarded the department a grade 1 in Teaching and Curriculum Design.

Curriculum map as a focus

The units designed by the computing staff have been used to map the provision on other IT programmes. The GNVQ advanced award in IT covers the same learning outcomes, so staff use the units to plan their delivery of this course.

This mapping has allowed the college to provide a weekly course to employees from British Aerospace, who study units from a GNVQ course and others from part-time IT provision. The learning they required was mapped against available units. In this way the college has provided cost-effective provision tailored to local industry. The staff are talking to a local employer about providing similar tailored provision to learners on shifts who cannot attend classes regularly.

A common timetable for lead seminars which introduce key skills will be made available to all groups across the college. Learners can then select the topics and times most suited to them.

Case study 2: continuous assessment

The site principal at Newport campus of Gwent Tertiary College considers combined teaching a key area of development. Staff have unitised large parts of the curriculum and are mapping overlap in different learning pathways. So far the following changes to the curriculum have been achieved:

- A-levels in computing, mathematics, biology, sociology, law and business studies have been unitised; the units from the computing A-level were mapped against GNVQ advanced diploma in IT and these two qualifications are delivered together
- GCSEs in English and mathematics are being offered on a unitised basis to 100 students on GCSE programmes
- an RSA certificate in computer applications is being piloted; the local OCN awards the credit for this
- the college has received approval to run a BTEC pilot award in key skills for lifelong learners for A-level students

- a technology in business course is up and running; this is based on Pitman's computerised accounts and book-keeping syllabus which the college restructured into a unitised format
- IT skills on three ten-week computer courses are accredited via unitised programmes; at the first level, 'Awareness', students receive credits from the local OCN, and at levels 2 and 3 the City and Guilds certificate and diploma, which have also been unitised
- credit-bearing short courses are now planned to update skilled hairdressers in cutting and blow-drying skills – some of these students already hold qualifications and are returning to learn new techniques; whole qualifications are inappropriate yet credits are flexible enough to be awarded for the additional learning achieved
- a short course in programme logic control has been set up for a local employer, accredited by the local OCN.

Interim awards increase motivation

Most of the learners on the one-year technology in business course are women returners. The unitised course allows learners to earn credits for successful completion of skills via continuous assessment. The lecturer believes that:

- the assessment methodology is more appropriate to students who need a gentle introduction to assessment, to build up their confidence
- the students benefit from their progress being recognised early on in the course
- the students are more motivated as a result of achieving the credits
- the portfolio-building skills involved are of additional value to the students.

The lecturer found that devising such a programme highlighted the need for learners to take responsibility for monitoring their own progress. When delivering the programmes, her focus has had to become more student-centred.

Learners are enthusiastic about the targeted feedback provided by the award of credits:

> *I didn't think I could do accounts. I've been a hairdresser but now that I've got credits I want to go on to develop my new skills and knowledge as far as possible.*

> *The interim award of credit has made the learning seem more important.*

> *I can see the point to each exercise because I've got the outcomes which I'm being assessed against.*

Quality of curriculum design improves

A lecturer on the computer awareness course commented that:

> *The internal verification for the OCN programme has provided a quality framework which has improved documentation for record-keeping and monitoring of progress, the timing of assessments, and identification of weaknesses in the course.*

The students have been encouraged to take ownership of their learning:

> *Students have identified outcomes achieved which have not been recognised and this has been fed back to the course team.*

The A-level biology programme was redesigned using units from the CREDIS database and then designing modules around them. It is now more flexible and is offered on a one- or two-year basis. Students on the one-year programme attend modules delivered to years 1 and 2 of the two-year programme. Students keep their own record of assessment and all sit the A-level as well as modular tests in practical, essay writing and structured questions.

The lecturer is confident that unitisation has led to improvements in the programme:

The modules have been designed to develop understanding progressively. This builds learners' confidence and ensures a firm foundation for the more difficult modules. Students are working consistently and although first-year students complained of too much assessment, the second-years had lost all fear of tests when it came to the final exams.

The results are encouraging. All but one of the nine students achieved A-level – the student who failed didn't turn up for two examinations. Of these nine, those achieving A/B grades had earned, on average, 22 credits for the accredited part of their programme; those achieving D/E grades, 14/16 credits. The pass rate was higher than usual and there was zero drop out. The lecturer pointed to two issues which may not be easily solved, but of which colleges planning modular provision need to be aware:

- for tutors there is a lot of marking and paper work; modularisation is complex!
- units studied in previous modules are often referred to in delivery to avoid fragmentation; this will need to be addressed once provision has been redesigned to allow students to pick up individual modules.

However, students are enthusiastic:

It made the course well organised and I liked having to learn the work as we went along. It made it seem much easier.

The campus principal commented:

Unitisation gives better opportunities for progression between qualifications, work and training and education. We would like to see all examining bodies adopting the specifications as a basis for their awards. Unitisation is essential to enable portability of achievement. Currently, we are resourcing national and local certification of some learning programmes. It might be costly but the benefits are enough to justify it.

Case study 3: cross-college planning

Llandrillo College has achieved maximum choice for learners through modularisation and the implementation of a college-wide timetable. Management staff at the college realised that flexible accreditation is required to provide recognition for learning and regular feedback. All accreditation schemes are now unitised or, in the case of A-levels, modular.

From April 1996, the college began a pilot of a learner transcript for a sample of students. This describes all learning in terms of credits at a level as defined by FEDA's framework. It has been pivotal in designing curricula and systems to improve recruitment, retention and achievement. The learner transcript and the systems to produce it are vital for tracking students and offering guidance on appropriate modular programmes.

All learners go on an induction programme, accredited by the local OCN, to help them to choose appropriate courses. Since this was introduced there has been a 20% increase in course take-up.

All access programmes at the college are part of a matrix of access modules which can be combined, subject to rules of combination, into individualised programmes. Universities have commented on how well-prepared Llandrillo students from this course are for this next step in their learning careers.

Examples of breadth in the programmes include the availability of a European Law module on humanities, social science and enterprise routes. Learners studying this were enthusiastic about the choice on offer. Students on the access programmes also talked of the benefits. One, who had switched from an access course in the community to access to enterprise on the main site, commented:

The cross-referencing of assessment criteria on pieces of assessed work has enabled me to chart my own progress. Being on a course in the community, the induction programme provided me with invaluable information about the college.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

STUDENTS FROM LLANDRILLO COLLEGE TAKE THE ACCESS TO SCIENCE COURSE AS A ROUTE TO UNIVERSITY – THE STUDENTS PICTURED HERE ARE NOW STUDYING SCIENCE AT BANGOR UNIVERSITY

Learners on the access to science route and the access to health science route are taught together for the bio-chemistry module. These students valued the flexibility that the programme offered. Two students on the access to health science programme intend to study physiotherapy at university. One said:

> *The modular structure means I can take an option in science instead of 'Sociology of Health' which most students on this route opt for.*

The other added:

> *Without the science option we would not have been able to consider doing physiotherapy at university. This has made it possible for us to apply to the HE course of our choice.*

Open learning opportunities

The college has been working on software developments which will give learners from the community, in small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and users at two libraries immediate access to databases in North Wales containing information about learning opportunities. The CREDIS database of units, established by the Wales Fforwm Project, is being linked to databases containing details of relevant open learning materials on loan in libraries and in the college, and on the tutorial support and associated qualifications available.

Case study 4: taster courses

There are approximately 80 students on GNVQ art and design courses at Carmarthenshire College's Alban Road site in Llanelli. In 1994, the college ran a part-time taster course in the community, alongside the full-time programmes. This was to test the market's interest in such a course, which offered an introduction to graphic arts.

A unit in life drawing was one of six selected as being most relevant to the largest number of students. Completion earns one credit, awarded by the local OCN. Out of the 19 students who took the taster course, three progressed to year 1 of the advanced GNVQ in art and design, one progressed to year 2 and two progressed to the intermediate award.

Because of the success of this course, the college decided to offer part-time access provision at the town centre site in Llanelli. Full-time access courses are available at the Carmarthen campus some 20 miles away, but there was clearly a need to provide similar opportunities locally on a part-time basis. Nine students progressed from last year's taster module and there are now 16 students on the part-time access to art and design course. The drop-out rate on the programme has been zero compared to between 3% and 7% on other programmes.

The access programmes are open to everyone and all applicants are interviewed. The modular structure means students can decide whether the subject suits them and they can be assessed to identify the level of progression appropriate.

The programme tutor said:

> *The ethos of the taster course was to give everybody a chance. Those who progressed to GNVQ are getting on with it and enjoying it. Since the taster course was so successful we are offering elements of the full-time provision at the Llanelli site, enabling the wider community to benefit from this route to higher education.*

One student in his second year of the advanced GNVQ in art and design left school at 16 with GCSEs in art and Welsh. He had tried since then to achieve qualifications which would lead him into a career. He left several courses before completion, with little to show for his efforts. He then took the taster units in graphic arts. This short course was enough to show him that he was good enough at design to go further. The college has provided him with accreditation of prior learning (APL) for the units normally studied in the first year of the course and he is sitting the phase tests with first-year students.

A UNIT ON LIFE DRAWING FORMS A KEY PART OF THE ACCESS TO ART AND DESIGN COURSE AT CARMARTHENSHIRE COLLEGE

A student who joined the taster class as a hobby when her children began school realised that she was good enough to do an advanced qualification. She said that before the taster:

> *The thought of the work involved to get a qualification frightened me because I wasn't good enough – this course built my confidence. If it hadn't been available I wouldn't be here now – I'd still be at home.*

Another woman studying full time for advanced GNVQ in art and design, commented:

> *I had the chance years ago to get a diploma and only did two out of the three years. This is my chance to prove I can do it. I've worked all my life in jobs related to art but the taster course taught me things about drawing which I wanted to follow up. When they offered us the chance of progressing to this course I thought it was a wonderful opportunity.*

Case study 5: reaching the disaffected

In Coleg Glan Hafren, Cardiff, lecturers wanted to motivate more young people with poor basic skills to take up vocational training. They recognised that learning opportunities at level 1 were thin on the ground, a finding confirmed by the FEFC Wales 'Heads of the Valleys Project'. Research by South Glamorgan Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) estimated that in the year 1994-95 there were more than 1,000 young people in South Glamorgan not taking part in education, employment or training. To make things worse, existing level 1 qualifications force learners to make choices which tie them to inflexible pathways. So staff decided to design credit-based programmes in core and vocational skills and to create delivery modules to motivate and encourage these young people to continue with their training.

While the college has found it difficult to attract these young people, many of the units designed for a full-time programme are now being used as part of various part-time community provision programmes in the city. Units in communication and vocational skills are providing a

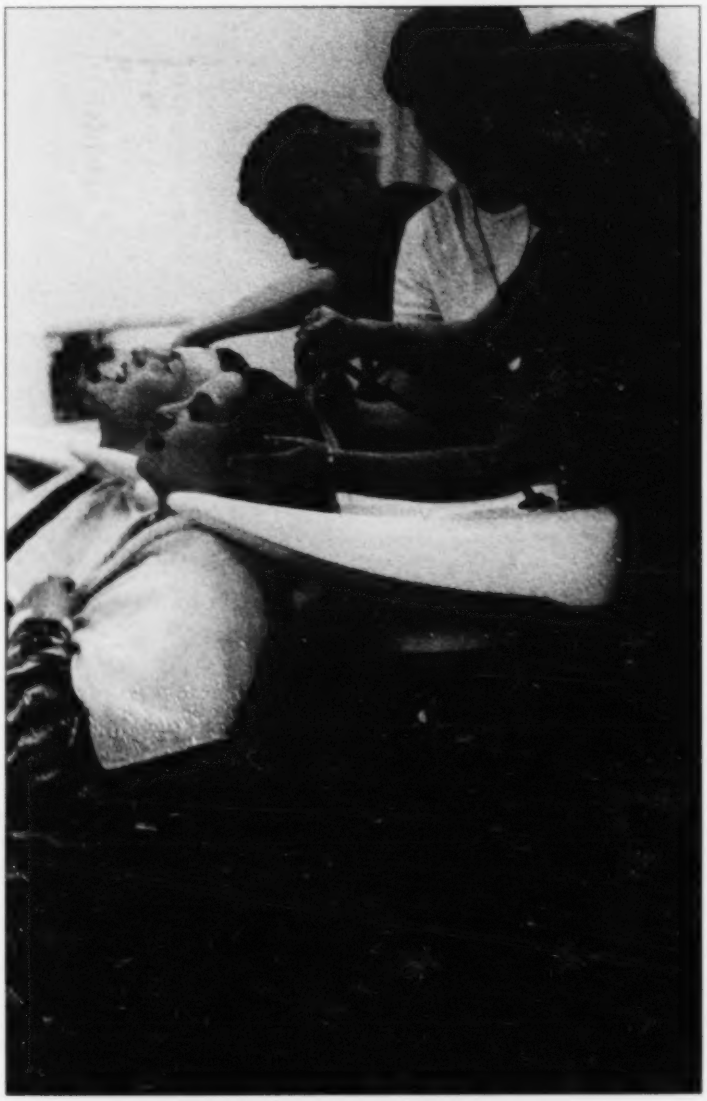
progression route for learners from family literacy courses. Students on English as a second or other language (ESOL) programmes are also being offered the vocational units to enrich their learning of English. Some young people are being recruited to the college from school referral projects, and staff plan to begin a full-time course, based on the original design. The project manager has identified that the key to future success is to achieve co-operation and partnership among the various local agencies, TECs, LEA, community and voluntary workers and other colleges.

The unitisation of the science and engineering curriculum has prompted further developments in this area. A new BTEC award is being designed, containing units from the science and engineering pathway and NVQ units at levels 2 and 3 in laboratory operations. The full award will be offered to part-time students wishing to progress to Higher National Certificate (HNC) or Licentiateship Royal Society of Chemistry (LRSC) programmes. Other students will be able to access parts relevant to their needs. Learners who have acquired the underpinning knowledge prior to working in a laboratory will only need the NVQ units assessed.

Case study 6: unitisation of access programmes

Neath College's access provision was first unitised in 1995. The programme now offers 159 units of assessment and 56 modules. Student numbers on access to HE programmes have increased from 20 students in 1994-95 to 66 students in 1995-96. The five pathways – IT, health and social care, humanities, media, science and engineering – share a common core of literacy, numeracy and communication. A number of common units are also available via shared modules, allowing students to select units outside their primary pathway, to add breadth to their learning.

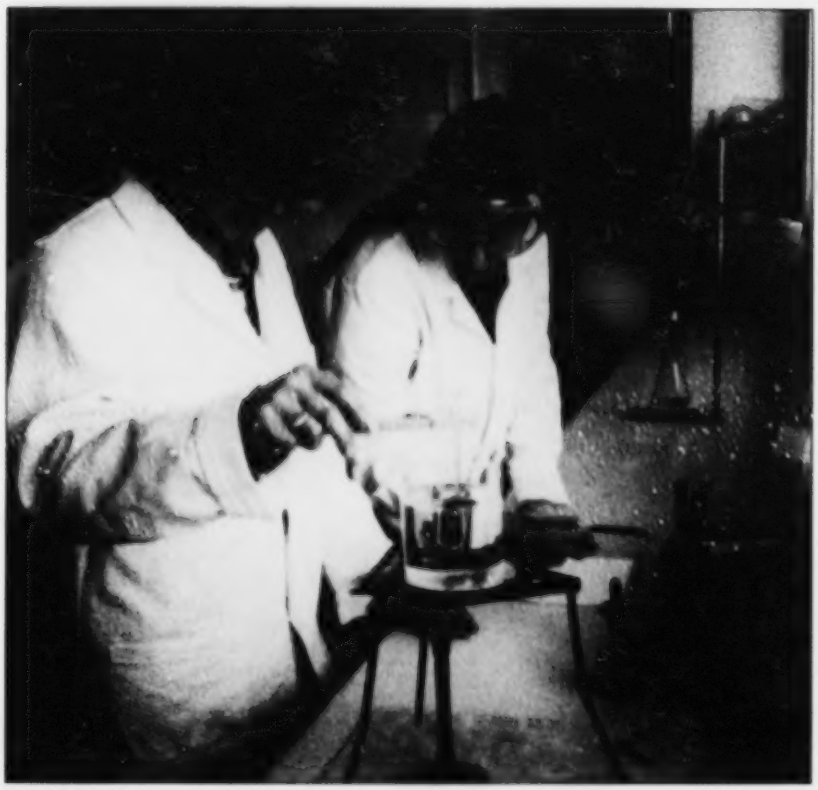
Central to this provision is the access to FE pathway. This is being followed by 25 learners who previously would only have been able to join basic literacy or numeracy programmes. The numeracy units have been designed to provide prior knowledge and skills for GCSE mathematics and this pathway is considered more coherent than the previous progression from City and Guilds Numberpower. In 1994-95, 75% of learners on this programme progressed to other programmes or employment.



STUDENTS AT COLEG GLAN HAFREN PRACTISE THEIR HAIRDRESSING SKILLS

Case study 7: mapping common elements

Pembrokeshire College had already mapped its BTEC national diploma in health studies against access to health, using units from the CREDIS database to modularise the course. These two groups were then combined, when an access to health care course did not go ahead due to lack of interest. The access modules embrace learning which occurs during the two-year BTEC in health studies award. Students can progress from this modular provision to a variety of HE courses, including nursing at diploma and degree level, biological sciences, radiography, occupational therapy and Bachelor of Science (BSc) podiatry. Since progress is tracked at unit level any students who cannot complete the BTEC national programme can be awarded credits for their achievements at point of exit. Students can transfer from the BTEC diploma to the access programme if this was more suited to their circumstances.



STUDENTS ON THE SCIENCE HEALTH STUDIES ACCESS COURSE AT PEMBROKESHIRE COLLEGE GET DOWN TO BUSINESS

Case study 8: improving life chances

In 1995, Swansea College launched a partnership with the local education authority (LEA), several schools and the university to provide appropriate learning opportunities to the communities of the east side of Swansea. This is one of the most economically-deprived areas in Wales. Since the launch, more than 3,000 enrolments have been made on a variety of programmes, including first aid, languages, IT and parenting skills. All of the provision is modular, and accredited mainly by the OCN, although other awarding bodies, such as RSA, are also used.

The classes are targeted at groups whose participation in further education is lowest: single parents, ethnic minorities, the unemployed and disaffected youth, and people with low levels of literacy and numeracy.

Members of the partnership began by identifying the barriers to participation. They then worked to overcome these by providing classes at times which suit the majority of the learners, by offering childcare, and by remitting fees. Several programmes are run in schools; classrooms which lay empty because of falling rolls are now fully occupied. This brings a financial benefit to the school and at the same time enhances its standing within the community.

The college surveyed the needs of the community and designed programmes based on these needs. All of the programmes are part time to be convenient for the learners and to make accreditation for small segments of learning achievable. Successful completion of most 10-week programmes leads to one credit.

The project manager has been delighted by the positive attitude to accreditation:

Initially people said they didn't want accreditation, but sensitive assessment methods and the pleasure of receiving an award has changed attitudes completely. On top of that learners can now clearly see what it is they've achieved and are beginning to plan the next stages.

We've worked hard to map routes through from these modules to programmes on the main site. One student recently progressed from a module in Mediterranean cookery to an NVQ 2 in catering. Another route in numeracy takes learners through from Numberpower to pre-GCSE units and finally to a GCSE in mathematics.

Of course we want these credits to be transferable too and are working with staff now to ensure that students don't have to repeat learning.

Further achievements in Wales

In the final year of the CREDIS project, 1996-97, work has taken place in every college in Wales to implement more unitised, modular provision on the basis of the credit framework. Colleges have concentrated on embedding different aspects of CREDIS within their strategic plans. FEFC Wales has developed its unit-based funding model to apply credit value as the basis of funding, wherever possible. Credit values have been established for GCSEs, A-levels and GNVQ units. A start has been made to credit rate those NVQs most often delivered in FE colleges.

Different groups of colleges have collaborated on projects to improve credit-based routes for students from 14 years old onwards, to develop more streamlined credit routes between FE and HE and to develop credit-related student tracking systems capable of producing transcripts of achievement. All but six of the 26 colleges in Wales have set up special projects to explain the benefits of flexible credit-based and unitised training programmes to employers.

The award for East Side Student of the Year went to a single parent who enrolled on several programmes including IT and Talking to Your Children. She now has a substantial portfolio of credits to add to her curriculum vitae, increasing her chances of employment.

All 40 centres run by Swansea College are now being used. Guidance is provided at all the main sites and many of the smaller ones by officers from the East Side Initiative and the University of Swansea's adult and continuing education department.

OFFERING A CHILDCARE SERVICE WILL OVERCOME ONE OF THE BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION FOR SOME POTENTIAL STUDENTS WITH CHILDREN

3. Colleges and credits: applying the credit framework

While the framework has been piloted in Wales, many similar developments have been going on in FE colleges throughout England. This is despite the fact that a credit framework is not yet national policy. Colleges have used the framework for a range of applications at an institutional and local level. They are doing this not just because they anticipate at some future point such approaches will tie in with national systems: they have found it relevant to initiatives they have had to achieve in the here and now.

As early as 1992, some colleges, such as Solihull and Wirral Metropolitan, began to adopt the framework for a range of purposes, including accreditation of adult programmes through OCNs (see additional case studies that follow). Between 1992 and 1995 more FE institutions made plans to explore and implement credit-based approaches to increase flexibility, cost-effectiveness, participation and opportunities for progression. During 1994-95 a total of 25 colleges took part in a college-based implementation project organised by FEU (one of FEDA's predecessor organisations) and funded by the Employment Department. More than 400 organisations, mainly FE colleges, joined the FEU national credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) network. Regional and city-wide initiatives began in a number of areas with development funding from various sources including the Employment Department, Welsh Office, TECs, private sector employers and educational foundations.

As a result, developments in 1997 include the following significant initiatives:

- Milton Keynes and North Bucks Framework
- Derbyshire Regional FHE Network
- Greater Manchester Unitisation Project
- Leicestershire Progression Accord
- London CAT Consortium
- North East Midlands Credit Consortium
- Solihull, Warwickshire and Coventry Credit Consortium
- South Thames Unitisation Project
- NW Credit Consortium
- Wirral Unitisation Consortium.

Some of these are outlined in the case studies below. There are also many single institution initiatives, at different stages of development, which have achieved differing levels of success. This interest from the sector has prompted a number of awarding bodies, in addition to OCNs, to develop awards using credit framework specifications.

Although only relatively small numbers of institutions sought to unitise and use credit-based approaches in the early 1990s, there are now a large number of colleges setting out on this road. This indicates a growing awareness of the relevance of the credit framework to current concerns about participation, efficiency, retention, flexibility and quality.

Credit-based developments have not been costly. Support for college developments in England has been found from within their own budgets, through bids to TEC development funds and, in a number of cases, via direct funding from businesses.

In 1996, FEDA evaluated the progress of those colleges involved in the first wave of credit developments between 1992 and 1995. Although they were operating in an environment not fully supportive of credit systems, their work has revealed how widely credit can be applied. Their experiences also show that colleges operating in an environment which is credit-based in terms of qualifications and funding are more efficient, flexible and effective. The work in Wales mirrors this.

The case studies that follow illustrate some of the developments that have taken place in colleges in England. Key applications of a credit-based framework are then summarised. Together they indicate the range of advantages the FE sector as a whole would receive if a national credit framework were established.

Applying the framework in England

Case study 9: developing learning materials and improving quality

Wirral Metropolitan College, a key provider of education and training for Wirral and its environs, was one of the first colleges in the country to recognise the potential of credit-based developments. In the early days it successfully pioneered credit accumulation and transfer within consortia and franchised programmes. It also accredited areas of the curriculum, previously unaccredited, which had been designed to meet the needs of specific groups.

The college's aim is to provide a quality curriculum offer which has the potential to maximise individual achievement, to promote access, transfer and progression and realise efficiency and effectiveness gains – all within the context of sharply reducing funding.

The college has used unitisation and curriculum mapping as an opportunity to deploy resources more effectively and efficiently. This has also provided a starting point for designing specific learning materials. The college reviewed its existing systems for programme delivery and organisation to help embed more effective systems for co-ordinated curriculum planning, subject co-ordination, resources deployment and development, and quality management. This included analysing the process for developing new programmes, examining curriculum delivery and ways in which this could be changed to increase efficiency and effectiveness. Measures identified included ways to:

- develop resource-based learning or distance learning
- deliver together qualifications which are within the same curriculum area but at different levels
- combine for delivery purposes different groups/units/subject elements
- use different types of staffing resource to support learning.

The English workshops are one example of successful implementation. They were set up in 1988 and developed alongside moves to embed a unitised curriculum. Present materials are produced in-house to help students develop their skills, to meet the needs of the new syllabus and to make good use of the college network, offering flexibility and accessibility to a wider range of students. An IT system was designed, called the Customised Menu Learning Resource System, to co-ordinate, present and describe how resources may be of use to the learner in their study. The system allows the tutor to collate the most relevant IT subject resources available on the IT network and present them to the student on a point and click menu. The staff also add a document which signposts the student to all resources and explains their relevance to the subject, and the learning outcomes to be achieved. The GCSE English Module workpacks can be printed out and used as a paper-based resource, but, more importantly, they can also be used across the network. The GCSE English presentation consists of the following modules:

Module 1	Getting started
Module 2	Personal narrative
Module 3	Response to reading
Module 4	Media and non-literary texts
Module 5	Response to Shakespeare
Module 6	Summarising

Each module leads to another level of the presentation. Students can communicate with English workshop tutors via e-mail to get support in working through materials or to send in assignments for marking, so they don't have to be on site to take part. This approach also improves resource management, since materials can be accessed from anywhere on the network.

Further developments

A number of issues still present continuing challenges to the organisation. These include:

- overcoming the barriers to educational change

- staff concerns over rationalisation
- ensuring the quality of the teaching and learning
- finding the correct balance between efficiency and effectiveness in delivery.

The college is now working to ensure that the good practice evident in the GCSE workshops is extended to other areas of the curriculum. This work is underpinned by a practical application of the credit framework: specifying and recognising the importance of signposting resources to the learner and to specific learning outcomes.

Case study 10: South Thames unitisation project

The South Thames unitisation project was initiated by the principal of Lewisham College and the principal of Woolwich College in response to the Audit Commission's report, *Unfinished business*. This report deplored the 'drop-out' rate in FE colleges such as Lewisham and Woolwich which serve populations with baselines for National Training and Education Target below national norms, where students have poor learning skills and where the age profile leans heavily to the adult, in particular the socially and educationally disadvantaged adult.

The project aimed to investigate the feasibility of "constructing a discrete generic model (or models) for unitising the curriculum which, if followed, could be used to unitise any curriculum or subject area".

While the overriding criteria for selecting the areas to be unitised were diversity and a mixture of the academic and vocational, individual areas were chosen because they:

- covered key skills (Numeracy/Maths, English and Communications)
- had little or no current accreditation (ESOL)
- had only partial accreditation (Stage 1 Fashion and Motor Vehicle Maintenance and Repair)
- had accreditation which did not satisfy the colleges' needs in terms of flexibility and cost-effectiveness (IT).

Project members, with the help of the London Open College Federation (LOCF) unitisation project, have written and piloted units of assessment in these areas. The project has shown that the credit framework first elaborated by the FEU (now FEDA) is applicable to any curriculum area.

Local collaboration

The South Thames unitisation project is a model of a successful collaborative venture. Lewisham and Woolwich Colleges collaborated in managing the project, in working as teams to write the units, and through joint staff development. The project has also been linked with a TEC (SOLOTEC),an OCN (LOCF) and a regional consortium of educational providers (the London CAT Consortium).

Project members took part in the LOCF unitisation project, a venture with 20 London FE colleges and adult education services to produce units of assessment in English, Numeracy, IT and ESOL. Either in collaboration with LOCF, or alone in the case of Fashion and Motor Vehicle Maintenance and Repair, the South Thames unitisation project has produced about 400 units of assessment. These are included in the London CAT Consortium CATalogues and are in use in the two colleges.

Although the project formally came to an end on 31 March 1997, its legacy will continue into the future. The lessons learned, the methodologies devised and the enthusiasm generated among a growing number of colleagues are now deeply embedded within the two colleges. This will ensure the further development of a unitised curriculum within the mainstream delivery structure. Both colleges are preparing whole-college credit frameworks for LOCF recognition and other ventures are nearing completion, including the creation in Lewisham College of an accredited unitised vocational programme for students with disabilities or learning difficulties.

The project's final report recommends that Lewisham College, Woolwich College and SOLOTEC continue their collaboration and investigate the feasibility of setting up a regional CAT system to support local initiatives such as Relaunch South London.

Increased flexibility and choice

The project members concluded that the full potential of the credit framework cannot be realised within a relatively small part of two colleges' curriculum offer. More widely, there are a number of barriers to progressing further at a local level. These, in particular, are the fact that:

- a framework is not yet national policy
- there has not yet been substantial success in credit-rating national qualifications
- an agreed protocol has not been reached for exchanging approved units between unitisation initiatives.

Nevertheless, what has already been achieved has encouraged greater choice and flexibility. This success can be measured by the steady increase in the number of students registered with LOCF for accreditation. In 1995/96, 1,014 learners in the two colleges sought assessment through LOCF 'database' units; in total they achieved 1,775 credits. In the current academic year, exactly 2,000 learners are registered with LOCF (Lewisham 1,526; Woolwich 474) with a corresponding increase in the number of credits they are expected to achieve. These figures do not include those enrolled on LOCF programmes which have been separately approved as independent entries but were created largely from units already approved and produced by the unitisation projects, so they do not represent the total number of learners who have benefited from the project's work.

For learners, choice has been increased because they:

- can choose to progress horizontally, to a wider range of skills, or vertically to a higher level of skill
- need no longer be confined to a level of learning dictated by their least developed skill (particularly evident in the Woolwich College ESOL programme, which is fully unitised).

For college managers and curriculum leaders, unitisation has:

- provided a common language for practitioners to talk to each other which transcends divisions and forms of organisation, making it easier to develop strategic policies on key skills
- provided a tried and tested framework within which managers and teaching staff are able to disaggregate the curriculum and find out what is actually there; this allows a swift response to new curriculum demands (such as the Internet and multimedia) and new forms of delivery (such as taster courses, pre-access courses, Summer Schools and Saturday Schools) and colleagues feel confident to innovate because they can be sure that a flexible accreditation system is available which is recognised by FEFC and can be potentially funded
- contributed to the development of progression routes, including to HE

Improved teaching and learning

Unitisation has allowed learners to raise their level of motivation and achievement by:

- making the curriculum more transparent and accessible
- breaking assessment down into manageable 'chunks'
- recognising achievement at intermediate stages
- enabling progress at their own pace
- facilitating transfer between programmes by showing what units have already been covered and what will have been missed.

Because learning outcomes and assessment criteria are clearly defined, the nature and level of achievement are more transparent to tutors and learners and to employers and admissions staff.

A major issue for the two colleges is how to create quality assurance (QA) systems that are rigorous and consistent but at the same time cost-effective and not bureaucratic.

Lewisham and Woolwich Colleges have instituted internal QA systems which are similar in essentials. They are based on the NVQ/GNVQ system of internal verifiers, familiar to many colleagues, whose task is to ensure that all lecturers concerned with delivery towards a particular unit of assessment are involved in internal standardisation and that consistency of standards is maintained.

Case study 11: progression through credit

Dearne Valley College (formerly Rockingham College) lies within the Rotherham district, close to its boundaries with Barnsley and Doncaster. It has 11,500 enrolments and offers a curriculum with a strong vocational bias covering the service industries, construction, education, health and social care, business administration and management.

Between 1992 and 1996 the college received more than £7 million of European funding to support SMEs in the regeneration of the Dearne Valley. This provided new and refurbished buildings on a site donated by British Coal. A further £2m of government funding provided a higher education block and Telematics project (which combines information and telecommunications technology) managed by the University of Sheffield. The college now has an established industrial liaison team which works with employers and vocational specialists across the college to identify and meet training needs. Currently, 35% of students are enrolled on training programmes linked through local employers. It also has an HE partnership with the University of Sheffield which includes Barnsley College and Rotherham College.

Like most colleges, during the past decade Dearne Valley College has improved responsiveness and flexibility. The curriculum is unitised, allowing roll-on roll-off access or multiple entry points. It is supported by resource-based learning and new technology. From September 1997 all units will carry credit and by September 1998 students will have credit transcripts.

The college plans to use the credit framework in partnership with employers and HE to promote achievement and encourage regeneration in the area. Most students follow vocational programmes, so the college is particularly interested in using credit allocated to vocational qualifications at level 3 and above to negotiate HE entry and fast track arrangements. Although the F/HE partnership has agreed the use of vocational credit in principle, in practice progress is slow. This is because, in the absence of a nationally-agreed credit framework, each unit requires full justification of its credit value. Discussion is also complicated by a lack of understanding in HE of vocational qualifications and how these may relate to undergraduate and postgraduate study. However, this debate is valuable with vital consequences for developing the local workforce and for regeneration.

Many employers request a mix of units from different qualifications for their employees rather than entire qualifications. Theoretically, a credit framework can satisfy this requirement, but the current funding methodology mitigates against using units from the national framework. This has pushed the college to extend its framework via the OCN and the Welsh database to deliver customised training.However, where appropriate units exist in the national framework, this strategy is wasteful of time and effort.

The next stage of development is to promote the credit framework and credit transcripts with employers. The industrial liaison team will be asked to pilot this during the next academic year. The principal benefits will be described in terms of flexibility and motivation. Credit gives purpose and coherence to lifelong learning. By the end of this phase the college hopes to have firm progression agreements in place with its HE partners in a number of vocational areas.

Case study 12: facilitating progression

The Leicestershire Progression Accord (LPA) is a collaborative progression agreement linking schools, colleges and the three local universities in Leicestershire. It operates at two levels. Part I Accord links schools with the FE sector, and Part II links FE institutions and school sixth forms with HE.

The LPA is designed to accredit a wider range of learning than that accredited through traditional qualifications. Learners who successfully complete the LPA requirements gain preferential offers from receiving institutions and HE departments. In the case of the Part II Accord this is currently a four-point reduction on the standard A-level or GNVQ-equivalent offer. For Part I Accord students must gain at least five credits, one from each of the five curriculum areas. For Part II, three out of the five must be at level 3. The five curriculum areas, in which student achievement is accredited, are known as 'elements'. Units are produced for each of these and approved by a panel. These elements reflect important, but often unaccredited areas of the curriculum: learner skills and attributes demonstrated through a programme of careers education and guidance; the personal and interpersonal skills demonstrated through broadening enrichment activities, and the practical application of the key skills of IT, numeracy, and communications.

This year the first pilot cohort of Year 13 learners applied for HE courses using the Accord and 54 of the 120 received either confirmed or insurance offers. As a percentage of offers to applications made across the three universities this represents a 'success' rate of 69%. Those involved in managing Accord will be tracking the destinations of this cohort and the universities will be tracking their performance for the first year of their courses. Next year a much larger cohort of learners have been registered for the LPA – at least 1,800 students. The vast majority of these learners will not wish to complete the full Accord, as they will wish to progress to non-participating universities. However, their institutions are keen to register them so that they gain a partially accredited LPA. This is because the scheme gives areas such as careers and enrichments more credos and currency in learners' eyes where they carry accreditation. The programme uses the Code of Practice for Careers Education and Guidance, designed by the local careers service. All LPA institutions must work towards this code and their careers programmes will be moderated by the careers service. This will allow institutions to bring their provision in line with recent OFSTED and legislative requirements while ensuring their learners gain credit from the programme. This is particularly important to the 17 schools involved in the Part I Accord.

The LPA is to be incorporated within the new national record of achievement, Profile, as an accredited component. To achieve this, the key skill elements of the LPA are being reviewed in the light of the Dearing recommendations. So far, units for the key skills of 'Improving own learning and performance' and 'Working with others' have been produced.

Case study 13: basing resourcing on credit

In 1991, Solihull College identified the unitised curriculum as its key strategy for achieving flexibility. It believed that credit would allow it to design a curriculum which would allow their learning to be accredited. To achieve this the curriculum had to be unitised so that credits could be allocated to the units of learning outcomes that students achieved.

The college has made slow, though steady, progress. Most of the curriculum is now unitised through NVQ, GNVQ, OCN and other unitised qualifications including modules of A-level which the college defines as units. Nearly 2,000 credits are attached to the OCN units that the college offers and GNVQ, GCSE and some A-level, NVQ and BTEC programmes have been temporarily credit rated. So far only students with OCN credits have been accredited. The college will accredit students with credits achieved through units of other qualifications once these have been nationally agreed.

In the early years of attempting to unitise the curriculum, the college focused on development and not at all on resourcing. This meant that parts of programmes which had been unitised could not be offered as separate units because they were resourced as whole courses with one qualification at the end. It was only when the college began resourcing via units that real progress was made, allowing students to take advantage of a flexible offer. This year, 4,773 students followed units from mixed qualifications (excluding A-level and GCSE students). The number last year was 3,998.

Central to Solihull's resourcing model are the following three organisational principles:

- the curriculum is organised in areas for resourcing and quality purposes, each being defined by the units for which it is responsible; hence the Languages Curriculum Area is responsible for the quality and resourcing of languages *across* the college; this has also been applied to key skills so that the curriculum areas responsible for numeracy, communications and IT hold the resource for their respective units and their staff act as consultants to the other curriculum areas to help them deliver their key skills provision
- learning provision is divided into three categories: taught modules, resource-based learning and caseloaded delivery
- activities outside the units – tutoring, induction, verification and so on – are identified and resourced separately.

Each curriculum area is resourced on the number of units it offers. Each unit attracts a certain number of notional guided learning hours and has the potential to be converted to credit. The unit is multiplied by the anticipated number of students expected to enrol. The college carefully distinguishes between the learning provision and the units of assessment so that the resourcing follows the units of assessment, that is the credits, and not how the student accesses the learning to enable them to achieve the credits.

Tables 1 and 2 (below) illustrate the basis on which the college resources intermediate GNVQs. The design framework is built around units of assessment not modules of delivery. Delivery modules may well embrace a number of units or parts of units from GNVQs or other qualifications and include caseloaded and resource-based learning provision. The key skills units, for example, are not delivered as discrete modules.

TABLE 1: CREDIT AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION FOR AN INTERMEDIATE GNVQ

Level 2	Guided hours	Credit rating
GNVQ units		
1. mandatory	40	2
2. mandatory	40	2
3. mandatory	40	2
4. mandatory	40	2
1. optional	40	2
2. optional	40	2
communications*	40	2
numeracy*	40	2
IT*	40	2
learning to learn•	40	2
managing self •	40	2
working with others•	40	2
whole Int GNVQ	480	24
additional unit	40	2
GCSE	120	6

* These hours are to be allocated to the curriculum area responsible for the key skills to fund key skill consultants for each curriculum area.

• These are delivered through tutoring and are an example of caseloaded delivery. These hours are added to the named tutor's hours.µ

TABLE 2: FURTHER STAFF HOURS ALLOCATED TO INTERMEDIATE GNVQ

Activity	Staff allocation per group of 16
Tutoring includes induction, monitoring the learning conversations and portfolio development. The resource is based on a caseload of six hours per student.	96

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Case study 14: institutional change

At Manchester College of Arts and Technology (MANCAT), the curriculum portfolio is diverse and tends to be strongest in non-traditional areas, whether this be in delivering distance learning programmes to 'blue chip' companies or developing access programmes for disadvantaged adults and minority groups in the inner city. Curriculum priorities are to provide flexibility and quality and the college is known for its responsiveness.

Shortly after publication of *A Basis for Credit?*, MANCAT committed itself to curriculum unitisation. This was launched with cross-college staff development in February 1994. The aim was to use a whole college approach to the credit framework to:

- provide a 'vehicle for curriculum change', encouraging student centredness
- map the entire college curriculum building a database to provide increased choice for students through improved information available for advice and guidance
- encourage flexible modular delivery to increase student participation
- improve student retention, motivation and achievement
- provide the potential for improved management information including resource monitoring and value-added calculations
- maximise FEFC income through the recurrent funding methodology.

An earlier initiative was to focus on the quality of college 'threshold services', particularly student induction.

The credit framework was identified as the means by which unit accreditation could be achieved, thereby encouraging modularisation and resource-based learning, the improvement of tutorial systems as well as the management of learning.

The approach adopted was to seek a 'big bang' rather than incremental change on a college-wide basis, albeit that the strategic plan identified refinement and improvement over a three-year cycle. The first phase was to:

- map the curriculum using a unitisation proforma to set up a database
- improve tutorial systems and support to ensure coherence was maintained, and developed, in individual learning programmes
- focus development around the college's learning resource function and in resourced-based learning centres.

However, with the benefit of hindsight, the college realised that the 'big bang' approach was a mistake. It led to uneven implementation. It would have been better to adopt a more phased and structured approach.

Despite the mistakes made, the benefits that have been achieved include:

- providing a clear focus for curriculum change and development
- more flexible curriculum delivery
- accreditation of student achievement, where previously they would have 'nothing to show'
- improved understanding of accreditation, quality and management information system issues
- greater ability to optimise recurrent funding through 'additionality' (secondary leaning goals) and partial achievement.

Key applications of a credit-based system

Promoting institutional change

The credit framework provides a strategic focal point for change across an institution. Since it is designed to be used for systems other than just accreditation, it means that colleges receive several initiatives for the price of one.

Having the same language and instruments for measurement across a number of initiatives – for example for funding and resourcing, qualifications, staff appraisal and reporting achievement – creates many benefits. Curriculum mapping, modularisation and flexibility or quality initiatives are possible without using the credit framework, or using it only in isolation. However, used as a strategic focal point the framework unifies disparate initiatives across an institution and provides a cost-effective mechanism for simultaneous staff and curriculum development.

Mapping the curriculum

Colleges have used the credit framework as a straightforward tool to map the curriculum for a variety of purposes. Curriculum mapping is often used as the first stage in:

- designing new provision
- looking for more cost-effective curriculum delivery including co-teaching and developing common modules
- deciding on assessment needs
- introducing quality assurance systems.

Because the framework is based around units, colleges can look at their existing provision, and devise new units which will fill any gaps. In so doing, they can fulfil learning outcomes which other qualifications miss out, often ones which are crucial to specific learner groups, for example, part-time employed students. If learning is broken down into units, it is quite easy to identify where there are common elements among different qualifications. This has immediate benefits by making resource use more efficient. Once colleges have discovered where overlaps in learning occur, across different courses on their curriculum, they can then plan for delivering these aspects concurrently. Not only does this free up staff time, but students benefit from the variety that a fresh learning environment, and possibly a different tutor, can offer, and from seeing the links between different subject areas.

Achieving flexibility, unitisation and modularisation

Institutions have used the credit framework as an effective way to disentangle and make clearer to staff and students issues surrounding unitisation, modularisation and flexibility.

The framework has made colleges better able to meet the needs of local businesses and the community. It has allowed them to customise provision and offer recognised awards for areas not covered by existing qualifications where:

- their needs are local and specific
- the qualifications available are not sufficiently up to date, do not offer unit accreditation and are inflexible.

The credit framework has offered institutions a clear way to distinguish between units of assessment and modules of delivery. They report that the credit-based approach offers a much more flexible and all-encompassing institutional approach than rigid, blocked, time-based modular systems. Credit-based unitisation has allowed FE institutions to develop more flexible provision, whether it is confined to a single programme area or is implemented as a college-wide unitisation initiative.

Providing assessment in stages

Breaking learning down into smaller chunks gives the opportunity to offer assessment in controlled stages. This can be particularly beneficial for students returning to learn who need their confidence built up and for whom assessment is often a barrier to taking that step. Using this framework as a means to provide

units which offer a more precise and sensitive approach to assessment can be an effective way to remove or at least reduce this fear. Another benefit is that learners achieve recognition for their achievement early on in the course. The value of the motivation this generates should not be underestimated, particularly in a climate where increasing participation in FE is a key goal. While staging assessment may mean that tutors have to devote more time to assessment activity, they will, as a result, know whether or not students have gained the necessary understanding to progress to the next stage. In this way they can ensure a firm foundation has been built before they move on to more difficult modules.

Targeting provision

Colleges can use the unit-based feature of the framework as an opportunity to design courses to cater for specific target groups. For example, research has shown that young people with low level basic skills are invariably being failed by existing provision. Colleges are using the framework to design programmes which deliver core and vocational skills via modules designed to encourage these young people to enjoy learning and hence to continue with their training.

Increasing choice

Experiences of colleges using the framework have revealed the immense potential that it has to offer in widening choice for learners. By mapping units common to different qualifications, colleges will automatically be opening up a greater number of learning pathways for their students. Learners are not caught in the trap of having to commit to a particular pathway early on, because they can transfer between courses and hence change routes as they go. Colleges are providing taster courses based on units to allow students to discover whether they are confident enough to take a full course in the subject. Students who decide not to progress will not have had their time wasted; any units achieved will have earned them credits.

Improving teaching and learning

Organising the curriculum into units improves learner motivation, involvement and understanding of progress. The unitised curriculum provides a high level of feedback to learners and avoids duplication of learning. Learners can access parts of a course relevant to their knowledge and intended pathway. Similarly, where accreditation has been developed, students who drop out of a course before the end of the programme will have earned credits for any units achieved.

Using the credit framework for development at course-team level places learning outcomes at the centre of staff discussions. It encourages course teams to question the purpose, structure and delivery of the curriculum, to be more aware of quality and to identify and tackle problems. The unitised curriculum also makes teachers more aware of their accountability to learners and managers. Colleges can create learning materials based around the units, allowing them to offer better curriculum support for smaller components of the provision.

Enhancing quality

The credit framework can also be used to aggregate achievement across the institution. Aggregating credit is a more comprehensive and sensitive measure of overall outcomes than full qualifications and may be used to monitor institutional, faculty, course, or even tutor performance against targets. Some institutions have used the framework to enhance quality and to measure improvement in a common way.

Maximising use of resources

Breaking down whole courses into units of assessment makes it possible for colleges to identify parts of provision which might be made more widely available within the institution and to new customers. In some cases colleges have reported that had they not unitised provision, they might have written off whole areas of provision as not viable. Unitising the curriculum has allowed them to see how

their human and physical resources could be used in new ways, either by slotting into existing provision or providing self-standing short courses. It has also helped managers to make better informed, fairer and more rational decisions about course and departmental closures and amalgamations which do not damage learner opportunities.

Defining progression agreements

Many colleges have used the credit framework for progression agreements and to set targets in terms of credit values and levels. Such agreements provide an incentive to learners. A college can use the framework to describe its course entry requirements in a commonly understood format. Institutions are developing credit transcripts and other recording mechanisms which allow learners to place all of their achievement on a single document which measures and describes it in a common way. This helps colleges to see instantly what a student has achieved, making it easy to set progression agreements. A credit transcript for Wales is being piloted and regional credit transcripts are being developed in England. External progression agreements, both feeding into college courses and leading to courses in other institutions and in higher education, are also greatly enhanced.

Marketing provision

Colleges have used the credit framework level descriptors in their prospectus to give a consistent indication of the level of qualification and courses on offer.

The credit framework level descriptors are explained in the prospectus and then appear in the title of each course or qualification on offer in the college. The level is used to indicate to learners, in a straightforward way, which courses might be most suitable for them and how courses and qualifications compare with one another. It also helps the college to market less well-known awards, such as OCN credits, within the same framework.

Offering guidance

Colleges have also found the levels framework useful for providing guidance to new and existing students. It has helped them to meet the new lifetime learning agenda and to prepare for an environment where adults seek to improve skills not necessarily via full qualifications. Many colleges have found it valuable to plan and market the curriculum through unitisation and modularisation, to meet the needs of 16-18 year olds as well as the increasing demands of adult learners and employers.

Summary

- Use of credit means units and modules do not need to be a standard size.
- Units of assessment and modules of delivery form a key concept for understanding achievement and for planning and funding provision.
- Using the credit framework for funding purposes can simplify the relationship between funding and the curriculum.
- Colleges have adopted credit-based systems because they have helped them to deliver their own targets and goals.
- Colleges claim that developments would go further if uncertainties about national policy on qualifications and funding were removed.
- A nationally co-ordinated framework is vital to provide consistency for all users, with a universal standard set for credit values and ratings.

Once FEDA's framework achieves national recognition, it will mean that all learners in the UK can undertake programmes in the knowledge that their learning achievements will be more widely recognised and more transparent and portable.

Key terms

Credit framework: a set of specifications for describing and comparing achievement

CATS: Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems

Learning outcomes: what a learner can be expected to know, understand and do

Assessment criteria: statements of more specific learning outcomes

Unit: coherent set of learning outcomes (of any size)

Module: a subset of a programme of delivery (of any size)

Size: the extent of learning represented by the notional learning time required to achieve the unit, expressed in hours

Level: degree of complexity, learner autonomy and range of achievement required to attain the unit, derived from agreed level descriptors

Credit value: the value of a unit based on the agreed learning outcomes, size and level, expressed as the notional learning time divided by 30 hours

Credit rating: overall estimated value of the whole qualification, or associated units, based on the intention of the designers rather than on an analysis of the learning outcomes

Credits: based on credit value and awarded to learners by appropriate awarding bodies for the achievement of units, when appropriate assessment procedures have been followed

Credit equivalence: a total value based on a combination of one or more of the following: credit values, credit ratings or credits awarded

Acronyms

APL – Accreditation of Prior Learning

ASDAN – Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network

BTEC – Business and Technology Education Council

CAT – credit accumulation and transfer

CLAIT – Computer Literacy and Information Technology

CVCP – Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals

DfEE – Department for Education and Employment

ESOL – English as a second or other language

FEFC – Further Education Funding Council

FEU – Further Education Unit

GNVQ – General National Vocational Qualification

GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education

HMI – Her Majesty's Inspectorate

HNC – Higher National Certificate

IT – information technology

LEA – local education authority

LOCF – London Open College Federation

LRSC – Licentiateship Royal Society of Chemistry

NVQ – National Vocational Qualification

OCN – open college network

QA – quality assurance

RSA – Royal Society of Arts

SME – small- to medium-sized enterprise

TEC – training and enterprise council

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